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Dear Mindset User,

Welcome to the first issue of the F.M.U.G. newsletter. This is your newsletter. We heartily welcome contributions of articles about both applications and programming, programs, reviews, commentary, etc. from any and all who are interested in the Mindset computer. The newsletter will be issued bi-monthly to begin with, but will move to monthly publication as soon as it's feasible. To join the First Mindset Users Group and start receiving a 12-issue subscription to the newsletter, send \$15 to the above address.

NEWS AND NOTES

Compatibility Update

- Good news, Pascal hackers! Borland's Turbo Pascal, rated top-notch by everyone from Jerry Pournelle to InfoWorld, works on the Mindset. Retail price is a mere \$50. Unfortunately, Borland's Sidekick program is not compatible.
- Lattice-C, an excellent implementation of a fast-rising language, is compatible. Mail-order discount price (see ads in Byte) is about \$300.
- Framework from Ashton-Tate is compatible, but doesn't leave much available working space. It should work fine with the forthcoming Mindset RAM extension module (see New Hardware).

Mindset In Print

So far as we know, only two full-fledged reviews of the Mindset have appeared in the major computer media. The first, which introduced many of us to the machine, was published in the April 1984 issue of Byte magazine. It's well written, and is so informative that it can be considered auxiliary documentation. InfoWorld magazine published a rather poorly-informed but effectively positive review in its August 13, 1984 issue, and ran three letters of response, including one from your editor, in the issue of October 15.

(cont.)

The issue of Ziff-Davis' FC Magazine of October 16, 1984, printed a review of Lumena under the title "Mindset On Graphics." Unfortunately, the editors neglected to list the article in the table of contents for that issue. It starts on page 194. Written and expertly illustrated (with Lumena) by Tom Christopher, who's almost as good a writer as he is an artist, the article is mostly complimentary. However, like the InfoWorld review, it unfairly blames the Mindset for problems with Lumena.

Mindset Software Revisions

Speaking of which, an updated and debugged version of Lumena, revision 1.06, was released to Mindset dealers in July. Also, a new revision of GW BASIC is scheduled to be released in mid to late October. If you've purchased either of these products and are in doubt about whether you have the latest version, contact your dealer.

New Hardware

Mindset's digitizing tablet, which makes drawing with Lumena and other graphics programs much easier than with a mouse, is available now by special order through CompuShop. The \$595 unit, which is manufactured by Kurta, connects to the Mindset through a special serial port, which is included. The serial port provides a connection for power, so an external power supply is unnecessary. However, this apparently makes the port unusable for connecting a modem.

Mindset has announced that there will be a 128K RAM expansion module for \$349, which will enlarge total on-line storage to 384K bytes, not including the 32K frame buffer. This permits the Mindset to run large programs such as Lotus' Symphony. Also, Mindset will produce a hard disk for its computer. We'll print details of these as we receive them.

The Mindset Logo

If you haven't seen the animated Mindset logo yet, you're in for a treat. Just turn on your computer without any disks or cartridges (what cartridges?) inserted and wait a few moments. It's an impressive effect!

THOUGHTS ON LUMENA

If Lumena and a Mouse were bundled with the Mindset and the fact well publicized, the company would probably sell more computers. Lumena is by far the most sophisticated drawing program available for any factory-standard personal computer today. Despite numerous shortcomings, of which lack of real

animation capabilities is the most glaring, the package allows you a full range of artistic expression, whether you can draw or not.

First of all, Lumena is not MacPaint. It is, in many ways, a professional drawing and design program, and is not designed to be easily learned by computer novices. However, despite its complexity, it's not difficult to use once you've learned the commands and how they interrelate.

Lumena is menu-driven, with "pop-up" menus that are activated by moving the cursor past the bottom edge of the screen. A menu sometimes appears when you don't want it while drawing low on the screen. Using the Mindset mouse to select from the menus is fairly easy, but drawing anything other than circles and spirals is not. Lumena is best used with a graphics or digitizing tablet. You may view on-line documentation about any specific function while accessing its menu. These instructions are sketchy, and are best used for refreshing your memory about details on how to use a command.

It'd be nice if Lumena featured a true Zoom mode -- MacPaint calls it Fatbits. This lets you temporarily enlarge a portion of your picture to four or more times the original dimensions so that individual pixels appear to be large square blocks. It's like working with a magnifying glass -- you have much more control over fine details in your drawing. Ideally, such a mode lets you 'slide' the 'magnifier' over the entire surface of the drawing. You can return to normal-size drawing whenever you want.

You can use Lumena's Zoom feature to enlarge an area of your picture, but you can't work on it in pixel-aligned blocks. However, Zoom does allow you to shrink the enlarged area back to its original proportions. To approximate the true Zoom feature, you could Put your picture to the alternate buffer, enlarge the area you wish to work on, reduce it back to original size when done, then use the Get pen to replace the altered area in the original picture.

Having to type in all file names is annoying. It wouldn't have been very difficult for the programmers to allow you to select a file to load with the mouse from an onscreen menu. Of course, you might still need to type in names for files to be saved.

Despite Mindset's claim that Lumena 1.06 is bug-free, we've noticed a few problems. We suggest that you avoid rapid cursor movement, as this seems to be the cause of most of these. Occasionally, the program acts as though a key has been depressed, spontaneously rendering a file listing on the screen and prompting you for a filename. Also, the Copy with Options function from the Moves menu doesn't flip an image if that option is selected.

If you're using an RGB monitor and have looked at the picture "GLOBE" on the Lumena disk, you may have wondered why it was included -- it doesn't look like much. However, if you connect your Mindset to a TV or composite color monitor, set Lumena for TV by pressing 'D', then load "GLOBE," you'll wonder no longer. The image uses varying luminances of blue and green for a impressive dimensional effect. It's interesting to note the differences between Lumena's TV and DTV modes -- you can tell which one you're in by pressing 'K' and looking at the line for 'D'. For instance, in DTV mode, thin diagonal lines 'artifact', or produce bands of alternating inaccurate colors. In TV mode, the same lines appear in their true color, but areas with patterns or fine detail 'shimmer' in a disturbing way. Unfortunately, the Lumena manual doesn't provide much information about the differences between the two modes.

VYPER REVIEW

Flight simulation programs are perennial favorites among microcomputer owners. Microsoft's small plane simulator for the IBM PC, considered by many to be the best example of the genre, has remained near the top of software sales charts for years (an unparalleled feat).

Vyper, from Synapse Software, is about flying, but it's much more than just a flight simulator. This tour-de-force of personal computer graphics is the first action game program designed for the new Mindset computer from the Sunnyvale, California start-up firm of the same name.

In the game you pilot a Vyper, a fast agile craft that flies repeatedly over and through a city represented colorfully in three dimensions. As you swoop over, around, and through the various structures, you'll swear you're actually flying a futuristic ship through an alien city. Practically the entire screen is devoted to the remarkably convincing (but not finely detailed) point-of-view display. Both in terms of graphics power and quality of game play, Vyper easily outpaces any number of commercial coin-operated video games, including some that use laser disks.

The 'experience' of flying the Vyper, in itself almost worth the package's price (\$50), is nothing less than sumptuous. The joystick controls your speed as well as vertical and horizontal direction of the constantly forward-moving ship. Its response to joystick movement is instantaneous.

Included with this marvelous flight simulator at no extra charge is a thrilling arcade game. The object is to rid all nine dimensions (levels) of the ancient city Kallithor of the rule of

the invading Rhyllian fleets. Zipping over and through the city again and again, you fire your lasers at the Rhyllian Shivfighters as they pass. Each of the fifteen enemy ships is supported by a Power Shroud building in the city. When you hit a ship, its associated Shroud begins to blink, registering temporary vulnerability. Before the blinking stops (about forty seconds), you must switch your weapons system to the high-density Byrellic Projectiles. Then, because these are always fired out directly forward and parallel to the ground, you must swoop down to a very low altitude to use them to destroy Power Shrouds. But your approach is limited because there's a long high wall immediately ahead of the Shrouds, so skillful flying and deadly accurate firing are a must. If you don't hit a Shroud before it stops blinking, it resurrects its Shivfighter to play with you again.

You must destroy Shrouds to maintain your energy supply, so you can't just fly about avoiding the enemy indefinitely. But it's usually better to delay your attack until the Shivfighters assume their wedge- or cross-shaped attack formations and are travelling in the same direction as you, when they're particularly susceptible to mass destruction. Enemy tactics can switch rapidly from second to second, making you wish you had an extra hand or two to work the keyboard controls. These are used to switch weapons, change your radar scanner from side to overhead, and to pause the game. The Shivfighters fire two types of weapons which are usually easy to avoid if you keep weaving, though you'll probably forget to in the heat of battle. They fly very low or close to buildings, often luring you into alarming involuntary head-bashing. Every such collision with a solid surface causes a major energy drain, even more than an enemy hit, and thus is to be avoided at all costs.

In Vyper, strategy is almost as important as hand-eye coordination. It's easy to pick off just one or two Shivfighters at a time, then slow down, descend, switch weapons, and blast the blinking Shrouds, then return to the aerial battle. But this is slow, and you're likely to suffer much damage from enemy fire while maneuvering on the ground. It's much more efficient, but of course infinitely more difficult, to wipe out a half or a third of the squad at once, then hit the associated Shrouds in one or two swoops. Every extra second between successive hits in the air can mean the loss of the vulnerability of a blinking Shroud on the ground -- the choice between continuing a chase and descending can often be a tough one.

Once you've destroyed every Shivfighter and Power Shroud, the entrance to a warp tunnel to the next dimension opens at the base of a tower. The long, narrow tunnel twists like crazy, and every time you scrape the side you lose energy, so your joystick handling must be most dextrous to make it through. Shivfighters attempting to escape to the next dimension often pass you, and you must blast these before they can get through to assist your next set of enemies. Major differences between levels include the shape of the grouped Power Shrouds (the first is wedge-

shaped, the second is circular, etc.), which affects your ground flying strategy, and more advanced enemy tactics.

The Mindset has both both composite video and RGBI (Red-Blue-Green-Intensity) output, as does our Sears monitor, so we were able to make an interesting observation about Vyper's colors. In RGBI mode, the game has but four colors -- red, blue, purple, and black, and surfaces are varied by the use of textures. Switch the computer and monitor to video mode, and you've added the colors grey, pink, violet, white, brown, green, and indigo to the scenery. Images are sharper in RGBI mode than in composite video mode, but the game isn't as colorful.

We'd also like to comment on the Mindset joystick, which costs \$40 and seems to be the only one that works with the computer. It looks somewhat small and fragile, but it has served quite well for extensive and frenetic playtesting of Vyper. It fits quite comfortably in the hand, and it's not difficult to get used to the alternate use of the two buttons on opposite sides (which, incidentally, makes it great for southpaws).

Synapse and the game's designers, Kelly Jones and Dan Browning, are to be heartily congratulated, not only for creating what is undoubtedly one of the finest action games for any home or personal computer, but also for calling forth some truly eye-popping graphics effects from this new machine. In Vyper, Mindset and Synapse have set new standards for computer game and graphics quality.